

## **MEETING MINUTES**

Finance Committee

December 2, 2009

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Time – 7:00 P.M.

Members in attendance: Chairman Joanne F. Marden, Mary O'Donoghue, S. Jon Stumpf, Cindy Milne, Richard T. Howe, Mark Merritt, Paul Fortier, Stephen Stapinski and Peggy Kruse.

### **MEETING MINUTES**

#### **September 17, 2009 Tri Board Meeting minutes**

Mark Merritt moved and Dick Howe seconded to recommend approval with corrections.  
The motion passed 7-0-1.

#### **November 4, 2009 regular Finance Committee Meeting minutes**

Mark Merritt moved and Paul Fortier seconded to recommend approval with corrections.  
The motion passed unanimously 9-0.

### **COMMUNICATIONS**

#### **SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE**

Mary O'Donoghue presented an overview of the Bancroft School Project. Ms. O'Donoghue reported that the School Committee was currently working on school population numbers noting that this could result in various redistricting scenarios. There was a brief discussion regarding combining both the Shawsheen and Bancroft schools. It was noted that it is the opinion of the State that it would be more cost effective to run one larger school rather than two separately. Mr. Stumpf asked if a cost analysis had been done citing there were those who did not agree with the State's opinion. Ms. O'Donoghue replied that it had not.

#### **TRI-BOARD COMMUNICATION COMMITTEE**

Mary O'Donoghue updated the Committee on the status of a newly proposed weekly Budget Blog that she, Selectman Mary Lyman and School Committee member Annie Gilbert are preparing in order to provide residents with another option by which to obtain budget information and to ask questions. Ms. O'Donoghue distributed copies of a budget overview she drafted for Committee review and asked for suggestions before placing it on the blog. All agreed the blog should simplify budget information in a concise way in order for residents to have a better understanding of the budget process. It was suggested that Ms. O'Donoghue provide committee members the information she intends to publish on the blog with sufficient lead time in order for them to make any changes and to approve. All were in agreement.

## TOWN YARD TASK FORCE

Mr. Howe gave a brief update on the Town Yard Task Force. He noted satisfaction with the Cecil Group Consulting firm currently in the development stage of the 40R Overlay Districting phase of the project. He expressed skepticism regarding whether or not it would be realistic to think this project may be able to go before Town Meeting due to a 60 day review process mandated by the State. Another complication noted to possibly delay the project going forward was the issue of whether or not leasing to purchase of properties is allowable by the State. Mr. Howe told Committee members that additional Town Yard Task Force meetings are planned adding that the focus has been on neighborhood meetings with good participation numbers.

Ms. Marden reported that the Board of Selectmen will vote on Tax Classification at their next meeting on Monday, December 7, 2009. She added that if the rate remained the same an additional tax burden would be shifted to commercial/industrial properties. However, Ms. Marden said she believed that the Board of Selectmen favored equally sharing the same tax increase between residential and commercial. Committee members were told this information was available at the Assessor's Office.

## **CIP DISCUSSION**

Ms. Marden asked Committee members if there were any issues they would like to bring forward to the three boards at the Monday night Tri Board Meeting. Lengthy discussion ensued regarding dissatisfaction with the FY2011-FY2015 CIP. Concern was voiced over the presentation of three large projects in one year without including cost estimates within a 5-year time frame. The three projects noted were the Elementary School Replacement, Town Yard Land Acquisition including facilities construction and the Ballardvale Fire Station Replacement. Some Committee members questioned if it made sense for departments to provide estimates of construction costs, timing of projects and approximate debt service numbers. Others thought that may be too difficult due to many unknown variables. Another opinion brought forth was that, due to rising costs, it may be better to begin some projects sooner rather than later. Discussion ensued. There was consensus that future recommended projects should include 5-year plans; that there is a need for longer term financial planning, that operating costs for each project should be estimated at the time of proposal and that the Capital Improvement Plan should be formatted in a way to allow better understanding for voters. It was suggested that the Finance Committee Association may be able to help with long-term planning. Committee members all agreed to voice their concern to the Board of Selectmen at their meeting on Monday, December 7<sup>th</sup> with the Capital Improvement Plan not including a comprehensive 5-year plan as currently stated in the bylaw. Additionally, that the Finance Committee requests that a policy statement be added that clarifies the scope of the Town Manager's recommendations for a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING FY2011 BUDGET PROCESS**

The following suggestions were discussed: Regrouping of a subcommittee consisting of representatives from the three boards, effectiveness of joint meetings vs. meeting with department heads separately, meeting with school principals, additional joint meetings with School Committee, meeting with departments earlier in the process prior to the published budget, ineffectiveness of tri boards, and Finance and School Committee relations.

## **NEXT MEETING**

Regular Finance Committee Meeting  
Wednesday, January 13, 2010  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room  
7:00 P.M.

## **ADJOURNMENT – 9:50 P.M.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
*Carolyn Lynch*  
Recording Secretary